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Is Turkey's Foreign Policy Moving East?

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

the Department of Political Science

of the University of New Orleans

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts, with University Honors

and Honors in Political Science

by

James Brodie LeBlue

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“Only the educated are free.”- Epictetus

Abstract

The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) of Turkey has reoriented its country's historical Westward-looking foreign policy towards the Middle East because of a freeze in European Union accession, trans-national security issues resulting from the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), and the expansion of its economic interests into the region. The United States should take careful note of these changes in an effort to mitigate any opposition to the AKP's policies, as well as to better utilize Turkey's growing clout in the region.

Keywords: AKP, JDP, Turkey, Foreign Policy, US, Middle East, Kurdish Question, European Union

Table of Contents

Is Turkey's Foreign Policy Moving East?	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Introduction	1
Historical Antecedents	1
The European Union	5
The Kurdish Question	9
Economics	14
Implications for US Foreign Policy	19
Conclusions	21
Bibliography	23

Introduction

In the midst of widespread public discontent and massive economic failure, the AKP won an overwhelming majority of seats in parliament in 2002. Since then, it has endeavored to change Turkey's lot in the world. While the AKP has changed many aspects of Turkish politics, one of its most striking departures from past positions is found within the realm of foreign policy. Turkey's alignment with the Middle East is more apparent now than it ever has been since its establishment as a republic. While this shift has not resulted in the complete abandonment of Western organizations and values, the AKP's growing assertiveness when it comes to foreign policy has fortified Turkey's diplomatic and trade relations with the Middle East. This reorientation had three main causes: disruption in the European Union's harmonization process, security challenges in dealing with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the boom in the economy caused by expansion into Middle Eastern business.

Historical Antecedents

The nation of Turkey as we know it today is the result of the efforts of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was very explicit about the foreign policy that he wanted his new nation to pursue. To avoid mistakes of the past, Turkey made tackling its domestic issues its number one priority. Atatürk, however, wanted Turkey to focus its attention on maintaining national unity and modernizing along Western lines. He often described the Middle East as a cesspool that would sap the resources of Turkey. He pursued these goals through the development of policies which forced Turks to adopt last names and replaced the Ottoman Arabic alphabet with a Romanized one. These policies revealed shrewd

realpolitik; the Allied powers had divided the Middle East into their spheres of influence and Turkey could in no way compete with them. Atatürk already believed Turkey to be a part of Europe; he just had to convince Europe of this fact.

After the death of Atatürk, Turkey eased its extreme neutrality and espoused cautious opportunism when it came to international affairs. Learning from Turkey's ill-fated alliance with Germany during WWI, İsmet İnönü's government stayed mostly neutral during World War II. When the war ended and the Cold War was just beginning, Turkey managed to gain the favor of the West by pursuing membership within the North American Treaty Organization (NATO). By joining NATO in 1952, Turkey could check Russia's ambitions for the Bosphorus Strait, a threat constantly on the nation's mind for centuries. Entry into NATO was seen as a crowning achievement for Turkey as it firmly entrenched Turkey in the West's camp. Turkey would remain staunchly allied with the West for decades afterwards.

Joining NATO was only the first step. In keeping with Turkey's Western orientation, Turkey continued to join European institutions and organizations, culminating in the European Community's recognition of Turkey as a candidate country in 1999. Being recognized as a candidate country was a watershed moment in the relationship between Europe and Turkey. It was in some ways another landmark step towards Turkey being considered European; however, to be considered for accession, Turkey had to meet the *acquis* prior to accession talks, an expectation which other candidate nations were not required to meet. If Turkey successfully becomes a part of the EU, this action would, in a fashion similar to what occurred as a result of their admittance to NATO, help to realign Turkey to the Western camp.

Flirtations with the Middle East in the Modern Era

It was not until the 1980s that Turkey began outreach to the Middle East. Until this time, Turkey had avoided all entanglements with its former Ottoman provinces. Prime Minister Turgut Özal began a

campaign of economic liberalization that was heavily influenced by the revival of free market economics by both US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; he attempted to branch out into the Middle East, the Balkans, and further into European markets. In many ways, liberalization was a smashing success. From 1975 to 1985, trade as a percentage of GDP increased from just 9 percent to 29 percent; GDP in 1975 was \$64.5 billion while in 1985 it was 67.5 billion. Trade as a percentage of 1985's GDP fell from 29 percent to 23 percent of \$244.9 billion GDP in 1995.¹ In 1995, Turkey's main trading partners were Russia, Ukraine, and Iran. As of 2012, trade as a percentage of GDP increased to 49 percent, and Turkey's main trading partners were Germany, Iraq, Iran, and Russia.²³

Elected to parliament for the first time in 1995, the Islamist Refah Party (RP) was only able to join the government when it formed a coalition with the Democratic Party in June of the next year. The RP sought contacts with many heads of state from Middle Eastern nations, and attempted to create Islamic institutions in the Middle East as counterparts to Western organizations. The most important and lasting result of these collaborations was the establishment—along with Egypt, Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan—of the D-8 (Developing 8).⁴ Most of the RP's other pursuits either failed tremendously, or were reversed after the military soft coup in 1997, which was conducted due to the military's fears that the RP was pursuing an Islamist agenda. The military was concerned that the RP's outreach to the Middle East was part of a plan to make the Turkish government Islamic. As the military sees itself as the stewards of secular Turkish democracy, they acted to remove the RP from government.

Foundations of AKP Foreign Policy

¹ Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy," 48.

² CIA World Factbook. "Imports Partners of Turkey," accessed 02/12/2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2061.html#tu>

³ CIA World Factbook, "Exports Partners of Turkey," accessed 02/12/2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2050.html#tu>

⁴ Bilgin, "Foreign Policy Orientation of Turkey's Pro-Islamist Parties," 410.

Economics played a central role in this foreign policy reorientation. It is the brainchild of AKP member, former chief adviser to the Prime Minister, and current Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu is one of the premiere voices of the AKP. His vision for the future of Turkey is laid out in his book *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth), in which he argues that Turkey needs to accept its Ottoman past and realize its potential as a regional actor. He moves away from language that labels Turkey as a bridge or barrier, and rebrands it as a central country.⁵ He argues that continuing to ignore the Middle East would be an enormous mistake; ignoring the Middle East would not necessarily mean that the Middle East would ignore Turkey. By this, Davutoğlu means that Turkey must be proactive in the international arena to prevent others from interfering with its ambitions. He argues that Turkey should not consider the EU to be the end goal, as it does not look likely that the EU will even accept Turkey. Turkey should pursue policies that take into account the EU, but it should also consider other alternatives.⁶ His ultimate goal has become known as the “zero problems with neighbors” doctrine, which he holds will allow Turkey to access economic opportunities. Davutoğlu wishes to have problems with none and great relations with all, which, he believes, would cause increased political clout in the region, as well as a more integrated economy with major players in the Middle East. This is a departure from past foreign policy where Turkey preferred not to engage with its former Ottoman provinces. Now, not only would it engage, it would also seek to create good relations with its neighbors in the region.

⁵ Kardaş, “Turkey Redrawing the Middle East Map or Building Sandcastles?” 124.

⁶ M. Cüneyt Yenigün, review of *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* by Ahmet Davutoğlu, *The Turkish Yearbook*, 2002, 304.

The European Union

As Atatürk believed the future of Turkey to be intertwined with the West, Turkish membership in the EU is seen as the logical extension of his plan. The belief among the Kemalist establishment, a bloc of officials who follow a hardline adherence to the founding principles of modern Turkey, is that a move towards the West is almost always good. Additionally, the Kemalist establishment would no doubt celebrate being more entwined with the secular West. Only when a threat to its national security has been perceived does the Turkish government separate itself from the West, as when Turkey invaded Northern Cyprus. It is no surprise that successive governments have moved in the direction of European integration. During the administration of the AKP, however, the EU accession process has stalled. This is partly the fault of a lack of an EU consensus on Turkey's place in Europe,

Turkey's integration into Europe could result in many benefits. Turkish businessmen would be highly interested in the increased investment opportunities. The Turkish economy would also benefit from increased foreign direct investment from the EU. Turkish citizens would also be able to immigrate with more ease to places with higher standards of living. Accession would additionally give Turkey a more authoritative voice when it comes to determining EU policies.⁷

Turkey's integration into the EU has also been of particular interest to the US, a nation which often supports Turkey by pressuring European capitals to continue accession negotiations. In turn, during the lead-up to the Iraq War, the US used its increased efforts as leverage in its appeals to Turkey to utilize the Northern Option, which would have allowed the US to send troops through Turkey's southeastern border into northern Iraq. The benefits of Turkish accession are many for the US; Turkey has often served as the US's ultimate model for a secular, predominantly Muslim democracy within the

⁷ Although many EU countries, most notably France and Germany, are hesitant to grant Turkish accession for this precise reason. France and Germany should reconsider, since providing Turkey with more authority would allow the EU to use Turkey as a conduit to the energy resource rich Middle East.

region. Turkey has also committed to fighting radicalism in the Middle East by teaming up with the US and several other nations to create a \$200 million fund that would direct programs in designated hotspots.⁸ The US supports Turkish inclusion for a variety of Middle Eastern security reasons. The EU, however, is “much more inward-oriented and... tends to view Turkey more as a security liability than as a security asset...”⁹ Turkish integration into Europe is being held up.

Trouble in Europe

Turkey has a long history with the EU. Joining the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development in 1948, the Council of Europe in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952, and the European Economic Commission as an associate member in 1963, it has been a member of many essential European institutions. In 1987, Turkey submitted an application to the European Economic Community, but the application was postponed because Turkey’s poor relations with Greece and the conflict with Cyprus. Turkish-EU relations hit a low-point when, in 1997, the EU included Greek Cyprus as a candidate country for membership, in spite of US pressure to the contrary.¹⁰ The Turks took particular affront to this act due to of the history of conflict between Turkish Cyprus and Greek Cyprus. To the Turkish mind, by accepting Greek Cyprus as a candidate for membership, the EU was taking a position in the Cyprus dispute. The EU was able to somewhat ameliorate the problem in 1999 at the Helsinki summit by admitting Turkey to the list of candidate countries. Since that summit, Turkey has passed numerous resolutions aimed at reforming its political, economic, and social apparatuses to meet EU expectations, although there have been interruptions, with accession chapters being frozen by vetoes from France and Germany on several occasions. While the EU’s admittance of Turkey has many potential benefits for Turkey, the process has slowed.

The EU has slowed the Turkish accession negotiations for years, due to lack of consensus

⁸ Schmitt, “U.S. and Turkey to Create Fund to Stem Extremism”

⁹ Öniş and Yilmaz, “The Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?” 272.

¹⁰ Yeşilada, “Turkey’s Candidacy for the EU,” 96.

within the EU on Turkey's place in Europe. While some countries, such as Britain and Italy, support Turkish accession, other countries, which include Germany and Austria, are much more hesitant, due to immigration concerns. While the British government supports Turkish accession, there are still some parties that oppose it. The British far-right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which has nine of the seventy-three UK seats in the European Parliament, is one such party. In keeping with other far-right parties, such as the Dutch Party for Freedom and French National Front, UKIP is also extremely Euro-skeptic and would naturally oppose Turkish accession. In addition to most of center-right and some left parties, these parties claim that Turkish Islamic culture is incompatible with Western Europe; they used the same argument of incompatibility with European culture when opposing the accession of Poland and other Eastern European nations. While the clash of culture certainly plays a role in the stalling of Turkish accession, it is only a small part of the story. The EU at large tends to view Turkey through the lens of its impact on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), employment, and deliberations in the European Parliament.¹¹

Turkish inclusion into the EU could pose problems due to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. The two major goals of the CAP are to supply direct payments to farmers for stabilizing the risks involved with farming, and rural development. It is likely that Turkish admission would cause the EU high budget outlays from direct payment to Turkish farmers, but only for the first few years.¹² Turkey would benefit more under the second pillar, as the EU payments would help to enhance rural infrastructure.¹³ It is important to keep in mind that these conclusions are tentative as it is likely that CAP rules will change before Turkish accession.

Turkey would be one of the most populous EU nations, which would put it at odds in European Parliament with the other large states, such as Germany and France. France is also hesitant due to fears

¹¹ Öniş and Yilmaz, "The Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?" 272.

¹² Grethe, "Turkey's Accession to the EU: What will the Common Agricultural Policy Cost?" 134

¹³ Ibid. 135.

of large scale immigration from Turkey. Germany and Austria have sizeable Turkish populations and so are worried about immigration consequences as well. As she considers Turkey unready for full membership, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has opted to push for a privileged partnership rather than full membership at this time, but as one EU scholar states, “Any form of quasi-membership is rightfully of as little interest to Turkey as it was to other applicants.”¹⁴ It is necessary to consider that this privileged partnership would serve to keep Turkey away from competing with Germany in the European Parliament.

Reflecting the lack of agreement among Europe’s biggest players, the smaller European states are far from a consensus on the Turkish question. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states are divided in terms of their opposition to and support for Turkey, while Poland and Romania, as “two of the largest entrants since 2000, have publicly stated their support for Turkey’s application”; they “are[,] [however,] wary of the competition for EU subsidies that would be provided by such a large country.”¹⁵ The concern by smaller European states about culture, which have been appropriated by far-right parties, is without merit. While accepting Turkey “would increase the Muslim element of the total EU population from the current 3 per cent to approximately 20 per cent[,]... only a sizeable minority, and mostly located within Turkey... [T]he Islamic presence...-would hardly be more visible than it is now.”¹⁶

European resistance to Turkish accession is insulting to the Turkish public. It has also been noticed by Turkey that it is the only state which is required to meet the *acquis*, the legislation of the EU, prior to accession negotiations. The snub of questioning Turkey's belonging in Europe has not gone unnoticed by domestic Turkish actors or their constituents: “Remarks by European politicians that Turkey is not European are considered humiliating. Euroskepticism has grown in the party system.

¹⁴ John Redmond, “Turkey and the European Union: Troubled European or European Trouble?” 312.

¹⁵ Ibid. 309.

¹⁶ Ibid. 313.

Opposition parties are increasingly criticizing the membership accession process.”¹⁷ Support among the Turkish public for EU accession has dropped from 73 percent in 2004 to 44 percent in 2013.¹⁸

The AKP Turns Eastward

With internal politics stalling accession and the foreign policy leadership’s determination to create a regional role for the country, it is no surprise that Turkey decided to explore the Middle East. The decline of Turkish public support and Turkey’s increasing clout within the Middle East have rendered bowing to EU accession demands without a definite timeline to accession, as well as bearing affronts from France and Germany, politically untenable as it might jeopardize the AKP’s immense public support.

The Kurdish Question

The Kurdish Question is of constant concern to both the domestic and foreign security apparatuses of Turkey. The Kemalist establishment made it abundantly clear that when it comes to guaranteeing Turkey’s territorial integrity, the Kurdish Question is of the utmost importance. Due to the Kurdish Question’s importance, Turkey paid extremely close attention to the policies of other countries when they addressed their Kurdish nationalist groups.

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) was established in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan and has been fighting Turkey to establish a Kurdish state. The PKK is a terrorist organization and has been the greatest domestic threat to Turkish stability. The reason that the PKK issue is such a central element of Turkish foreign policy is neatly described by Kardaş: “No longer preoccupied with the issues of

¹⁷ Bürgin, “Disappointment or New Strength: Exploring the Declining EU Support Among Turkish Students, Academics, and Party Members,” 568.

¹⁸ German Marshall Fund, “Transatlantic Trends 2013,” 46.

survival and existential security, Turkey has been less dependent on the Western community and more comfortable developing closer economic ties with its neighbors. Turkey's major remaining security concern in the Middle East is the regional dimension of the PKK threat.”¹⁹ Turkey has focused its attention on the Middle East in an effort to more adequately address the security threat that the PKK represents. For the majority of the 1990s, relations with Iran, Iraq, and Syria were tainted by PKK-related issues. Turkey’s relationship with Iraq was strained by the Iraq War, PKK presence in Northern Iraq, and Iraq’s recognition—within its 2005 constitution—of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil. These tensions were soothed when Iraq and Turkey finally came to an agreement to end terrorism in Iraq, particularly the PKK. Iraq saw more advantages to a good relationship with Turkey by ending the PKK presence in the region. After Iran and Syria stopped their support for the PKK in the early 2000s, they developed a cooperative economic relationship with Turkey.

Iran and Syria

Due to the support of both Iran and Syria in the PKK’s fostering of instability throughout Turkey, Turkish relations with these nations had been marred throughout the preceding decades. Syrian support for the PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan occurred for three reasons. The first of these reasons is that Syria and the Soviet Union were allies, and since the PKK adhered to a Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Soviet Union also supported the PKK.²⁰ The second reason is that Turkey pursued a water irrigation project that Syria worried could be used to prevent Syria from accessing water. Syria supported the PKK as leverage against such an eventuality.²¹ The Turkish alliance with the US, as well as Turkey’s warm relations with Israel, were also causes for Syria’s destabilization efforts. Based on factors such as the fall of the Soviet Union and Turkey’s assurances that Syria’s access to water would

¹⁹ Kardaş, “Turkey: Redrawing the Middle East Map or Drawing Sandcastles?” 118.

²⁰ Aras, “The Role of Motivation in the Success of Coercive Diplomacy: The 1998 Turkish-Syrian Crisis as a Case Study,” 210.

²¹ Ibid.

not be limited, along with Turkish soldiers positioned on the Syrian border, Syria ceased its support of the PKK in 1998 through the signing of the Adana Accord. As a part of this agreement, Syria agreed to shut down PKK camps in the Bekaa Valley and eject Öcalan forever.²² Syria-Turkey relations have warmed steadily since then, and before the internal Syrian crisis, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made numerous trips to Istanbul to meet with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

While there were warm relations between Iran and Turkey during the reign of the Shah, their relationship deteriorated quickly after the Islamic Revolution. After the revolution Iran considered Turkey an enemy state in league with the US.²³ For this reason, Iran became a sponsor of the PKK in the 1980s and 1990s; however, when Iran started to face security challenges from the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), the Iranian branch of the PKK, Iranian policy saw Turkey as the lesser of two evils.²⁴ Turkey and Iran entered into High Security Commission meetings where they discussed the fight against the PKK and PJAK, and in April of 2008, signed a joint statement declaring their intent to work together to end the terrorism of both the PKK and the PJAK.²⁵ With tensions over security concerns relaxed, Turkey and Iran began to develop extensive trade relations in natural resources, the main resource being natural gas.

The Iraq War

The 2003 War in Iraq has fostered a lot of tension between Turkey and the West, the US in particular. This is largely the result of the failure of the March 3 Resolution in Turkish parliament in 2003. The resolution would have allowed the US military to utilize the Northern Option into Iraq for the invasion. In a very narrow vote, the resolution failed. Blame for this failure has been attributed to AKP leadership ineffectively pressuring AKP members to vote in favor of the resolution.²⁶ The official

²² Ibid. 219.

²³ Final Report of the Institute of Politics, "United States-Turkey-Iran: Strategic Options for the Coming Decade," 79.

²⁴ Yeşilyurt and Akdevioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy Under the JDP Rule," 65.

²⁵ Karacasulu and Karakir, "Iran-Turkey Relations in the 2000s: Pragmatic Rapprochement," 115.

²⁶ Migdalovitz, "Iraq: Turkey, the Deployment of U.S. Forces, and Related Issues," 25.

reason promoted by Turkey, however, was that it was in agreement with international consensus, which deemed the war unjust. This position helped to enhance Turkey's reputation in the Middle East.²⁷ It is highly likely that the decision was also greatly influenced by Turkish politicians' recollection of the last time that Turkey aided the US in a war. During the first Gulf War in 1990, Prime Minister Turgut Özal sent 100,000 troops to secure the Iraqi-Turkish border, allowed the US to fly sorties using Turkish airspace, and participated in sanctions against Iraq. Through his acquiescence to the US, Özal hoped to reap specific benefits. Such benefits included creating a closer defense alliance with the US and increasing Turkey's stature in the eyes of the European Community.²⁸ It turns out that he miscalculated. By going along with US sanctions, the Turkish economy lost billions in trade and did not gain any of the benefits that Özal thought Turkey would receive.²⁹ This alliance also caused a resurgence of PKK-led violence. The creation of a de facto Kurdish state in northern Iraq in 1991 breathed new life into the separatist activities of the PKK.

This was the root of the Turkish parliament's decision regarding the March 3 Resolution; in addition to suffering economically, Turkey faced increased violence from their foray into the First Gulf War. Even though there was a ceasefire in 1999 between the PKK and Turkey, Turkish fears that the invasion would destabilize Iraq and give the PKK an opportunity to cement a presence in Iraq's northern territory prevailed. Though destabilization did not occur, the PKK still obtained a presence within Northern Iraq. As noted by Yeşilada and Akdevioğlu, "[t]he most important regional problem that the JDP [Justice and Development Party (AKP)] inherited from the previous era was the PKK's existence in Northern Iraq and [the] possibility of [the] establishment of a Kurdish state in that region under the leadership of KDP-PUK [Kurdistan Democratic Party-Patriotic Union of Kurdistan]."³⁰ Some

²⁷ Aras, "Turkey's Rise in the Greater Middle East," 38.

²⁸ Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East," 105.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Yeşilada and Akdevioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy Under the JDP Rule," 58.

of Turkey's fears were realized in the aftermath of the invasion in 2003 when the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was reconvened in Erbil; if the US's unwillingness to force the government in Erbil to address PKK groups in the region is considered along with this fact, Turkey's discontent becomes understandable. This conflict hit its height during the Sulaymaniyah incident—dubbed *Çuval Olayı* (The Hood Event) by Turkish media—on July 4, 2003. A group of Turkish soldiers were caught by the US military in Northern Iraq planning to assassinate the Iraqi-Kurdish governor of Kirkuk. The US led away the conspirators with hoods over their heads and released them into Turkish military custody after sixty hours. While this mishap went relatively unnoticed by Western media, it definitely left its mark on Turkish entertainment and news, as Turks felt insulted that their US allies would treat Turkish troops in such a manner. Newspapers in Turkey printed headlines calling the US forces “Rambos” and “ugly Americans,” the Turkish army chief of staff declared a “crisis of confidence” between Turkey and the US.³¹ Several novels and even a feature-length movie, *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq*, were made about the Hood Event. As Baran suggests within her discussion surrounding the film, these works greatly exaggerated the event’s details: “*Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* became a blockbuster, with its portrayal of US Troops in Iraq as bloodthirsty Christian fundamentalists who enjoy slaughtering Iraqis.”³² The movie’s initial scene depicted an exaggerated version of the Hood Event that was understood by notable AKP figures, such as the Prime Minister’s wife Ermine Erdoğan, Speaker of Parliament Bülent Arınç, and Parliament’s Human Rights Commission Chairman Mehmet Elkatmış, to be an accurate reenactment of the event and the Iraq War.³³ It was a low-point for diplomatic relations between the US and Turkey and reinforced negative sentiments, throughout both the Turkish public and government, concerning the US and its policies within the region.

The US preferred stability in the KRG to driving out the PKK, and Turkey’s successive

³¹ Howard, “US Arrest of Soldiers Infuriates Turkey.”

³² Baran, *Torn Country: Turkey Between Secularism and Islamism*, 131.

³³ Ibid. 132.

attempts to gain US approval for raids into Northern Iraq were denied.³⁴ Due to Turkey's inability to cajole the US into addressing the PKK problem in Northern Iraq more aggressively, as well as the fact that only 9 percent of the Turkish public viewed the US favorably,³⁵ the AKP decided to take more forceful action. The AKP began to assert the right to orchestrate raids across the Iraqi-Turkish border in November of 2007 to attack PKK training camps.³⁶ This increased hostility proved short-lived; the Erbil government closed all the PKK offices. The AKP began using diplomatic methods in addition to its military actions to reach a more permanent solution. After several meetings with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, Iraq and Turkey came to an agreement on the necessity of ending terrorism in Iraq.³⁷

With the PKK issue no longer tainting Turkey's relations with Iran, Iraq, and Syria, these countries were able to enter into a new era. Turkey began strengthening trade relations with all three. While Turkey's relations with Syria have been hampered due to the internal Syrian crisis, Turkey's trade with Iran and Iraq has grown.

Economics

During Turkey's 2001 financial crisis, capital fled Turkey. The economy contracted by 7.4 percent, leading to the highest unemployment in two decades. The Turkish Lira devalued by 50 percent, 95 percent of the population's incomes and savings were negatively impacted, and the number of people below the poverty line increased past the numbers recorded in 1994.³⁸ After the AKP swept into power, it was in a difficult situation. The only way to fix the shambles of the economy was to adhere to the IMF's restructuring program, which was deeply unpopular. The AKP criticized the IMF plan to save

³⁴ Yeşilyurt and Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy Under the JDP Rule," 60.

³⁵ Pew Global, "Turkey and its (Many) Discontents."

³⁶ Yeşilyurt and Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy Under the JDP Rule," 60.

³⁷ Özcan, "From Distance to Engagement: Turkish Policy towards the Middle East, Iraq and Iraqi Kurds," 79.

³⁸ Patton, "The Economic Policies of Turkey's AKP: Rabbits from a Hat?" 513.

face in front of its constituency, but it largely accepted the program with only minute adjustments.³⁹ This discontent permitted Erdoğan to enact Davutoğlu's vision of a greater and more economically assertive Turkey. Under AKP leadership, the economy rebounded and grew so much that Turkey became the nominal seventeenth largest economy in the world. Davutoğlu has vowed to lead the Turkish economy into the world's top ten economies by the Republic's centennial in 2023.⁴⁰ In its efforts to expand the economy, the AKP made historic strides in developing trade relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors. Energy also plays a key role here; bereft of natural resources, Turkey has had to approach the Middle East to sustain its growth and limit dependence on Russia.

Economic Collapse and Recovery

As soon as the worst of the economic crisis was averted, Turkey's attention was drawn to increasing its exports. This is where the Middle East became important. It was in this particular area that a significant base of the AKP, the business community, lobbied for economic penetration into the Middle East. With stalled EU talks, the Middle East was beginning to look inviting.

As previously stated, the AKP's primary goal upon election was to fix the economy. From 2002 to 2005, GDP growth increased from 5 percent to 8 percent and GDP per capita increased from \$8,000 to \$11,500.⁴¹ In 2009, GDP growth had fallen due to the worldwide economic recession to -5 percent, and GDP per capita was down from \$15,000 the year before to \$14,000.⁴² By 2011, however, Turkey had recovered substantially to 9 percent GDP growth and GDP per capita had increased to \$17,000.⁴³ Academics have noted that trade is taking on a greater role in foreign policy calculation.⁴⁴ Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, has said in interviews that not only has foreign policy been greatly

³⁹ Ibid., 516.

⁴⁰ Davutoğlu, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-vision-2023-turkey-s-foreign-policy-objectives-delivered-by-h-e-ahmet-davutoglu-minister-of-foreign-affairs.mfa>, accessed 4/22/2013.

⁴¹ World Bank Development Indicators. <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx?isshared=true>, accessed: 11/23/2013.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Most notably Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State."

influenced by business needs, but also that the interdependence fostered by mutual business interests creates “order” in the region.⁴⁵ This is a notable shift in the political culture of Turkey. For most of Turkey’s history it considered itself beset on all sides by potential enemies, Turkey now seeks to develop its neighbors into friends and potential trading partners. During the Özal government, there was a similar attitude, but Özal had to contend with an isolationist security establishment and the PKK issue kept him from thoroughly engaging with the Middle East.⁴⁶

Turkish rapprochement with Syria began when Syria expelled Abdullah Öcalan, and it has steadily increased since then. Bashar-al Assad became close friends with Prime Minister Erdoğan, a relationship which translated itself into improved economic cooperation between their respective countries and a free trade agreement in 2004. As a result, in 2007 Turkish trade with Syria increased to \$1.2 billion from \$797 million in 2006. The current internal crisis in Syria, however, has not been good for the trade relationship. In 2011 Turkey suspended the free trade agreement until the Assad government steps down. The trade balance between Turkey and Syria decreased from \$1.1 billion in 2011 to \$430 million in 2012.⁴⁷

From 2003 to 2006, 20 percent of the trade fairs that Turkey participated in at the national level were held in the Middle East. This increased to 24 percent in 2007 and to 30 percent in 2009. Free-trade agreements were signed with Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine, and Syria in 2004 and with Egypt in 2005. In addition, joint business councils were formed with Syria and Palestine in 2000, Iraq and Iran in 2001, Lebanon in 2002, Saudi Arabia in 2003, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates in 2005, and Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman in 2006.⁴⁸

The Middle Eastern share of Turkey’s foreign trade increased from 8.5 percent in 2003 to 17.16

⁴⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁶ Ataman, “Leadership Change: Özal Leadership and Restructuring in Turkish Foreign Policy,” 132.

⁴⁷ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy,

<http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=SY®ion=4>, accessed: 11/03/2013

⁴⁸ Yeşilyurt and Akdevioğlu, “Turkish Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule,” 65.

percent in 2010.⁴⁹ In that same time, the European share has decreased from 53.6 percent to 41.6 percent. Turkish businesses have also invested heavily in the Middle East. In September of 2009, over 500 Turkish firms invested in Northern Iraq, an act which resulted in Turkish trade in the area reaching \$5.2 billion. Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Çağlayan asserts that this will grow to \$20 billion by 2014.⁵⁰ The majority of these businesses is in construction, and over the last decade over \$35.5 billion was invested by Turkish construction firms in the Middle East.⁵¹

Following the 2001 economic crisis, the newly elected AKP not only enacted the required IMF reforms, it also embarked on an unprecedented campaign to develop trade relations with the Middle East. These campaigns were largely successful and helped to land Turkey as the seventeenth largest economy in the world. In order to sustain this economic growth, Turkey had to increase its energy imports. Iran and Iraq play an important role here.

Energy

Energy is an important issue for Turkey since—being completely barren of any natural fossil fuel resources—it has to import most of its energy needs. As a result, it is the recipient of the dubious honor of having the most expensive gasoline in the world.⁵² This has forced Turkey to engage with the Middle East for natural resources. It seeks to limit reliance on Russia and has sought greater energy ties with Iran as a result. Turkey has learned that Iran is not a great energy partner either; Iraq and Saudi Arabia have become the most promising leads.

With the tensions between Iran and Turkey that were caused by PKK security issues resolved, Iran and Turkey have begun collaborating on a number of energy deals. Turkey looks to Iran for natural gas in an effort to limit its dependence upon Russian natural gas, which accounted for 65 percent of

⁴⁹ Ibid. 592.

⁵⁰ Tūr, “Economic Relations with the Middle East Under the AKP,” 596.

⁵¹ Ibid., 595.

⁵² Dombey, “Turkey: World’s Most Expensive Petrol Underlines Policy Challenges.”

Turkey's imports in 2008.⁵³ To limit its dependence on Russian energy supplies, Turkey signed two energy deals with Iran in 2007: one gave the Turkish Petroleum Corporation rights to explore oil and natural gas fields in Iran, and the other approved a pipeline from Iran that transferred gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey.⁵⁴ These deals have lowered the Russian share of natural gas imports from 65 percent in 2008 to 58 percent in 2011.⁵⁵ Yet it is predicted that if Turkey cannot find other states, such as Iraq and Turkmenistan, from which to import natural gas, the Russian share could reach 80 percent within the next few years.⁵⁶

As Turkey seeks to limit its reliance on Russia, oil plays a significant role within its energy-based relationship with Iran. In 2009, Turkey imported 3200 tons of crude oil from Iran.⁵⁷ This increased to 9300 tons from Iran in 2011--representing 51 percent of Turkey's oil imports--but then fell in 2012 as more oil was imported from Iraq and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁸ As Turkish dependence on the Middle East for oil has intensified, Russia's share of Turkish oil imports has fallen markedly. In 2009, 41 percent of Turkish oil imports came from Russia, but, as of 2012, it fell to 11 percent.⁵⁹ Oil imports from Iraq have increased from 12 percent in 2010 to 19 percent in 2012.

Turkey's energy choices are not good. With no natural resources of significance, it must engage with Iran and Russia to supply its growing natural gas and oil needs. Iran and Russia, however, are not always the most reliable energy suppliers and sporadically take advantage of their positions, often failing to deliver shipments in a timely fashion, or to fulfill the amounts specified in contracts. These

⁵³ Karacasulu and Karakir, "Iran-Turkey Relations in the 2000s: Pragmatic Rapprochement," 116.

⁵⁴ Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East," 108.

⁵⁵ T.R. Energy Market Regulatory Authority, Natural Gas Market Sector Report 2012, 34.

http://www.emra.org.tr/documents/natural_gas/publications/NaturalGasMarket2011SectorReport_Q9WwGbRxxnRy.pdf, accessed 11/05/2013.

⁵⁶ Babali, "Turkey at the Energy Crossroads."

⁵⁷ T.R. Energy Market Regulatory Authority, Petroleum Market Sector Report 2012, 20

http://www.emra.org.tr/documents/petroleum/publications/PetroleumMarketSectorReport2011_kV9zybg4brMx.pdf, accessed 11/05/2013

⁵⁸ T.R. Energy Market Regulatory Authority, Petroleum Market Sector Report 2012, 33.

http://www.emra.org.tr/documents/petroleum/publications/Ppd_EMRA_SectoReport_2012_sgJPfn2bF6Qg.pdf, accessed 11/05/2013

⁵⁹ Ibid., 33.

two countries are the easiest from which to receive energy, but as long as the Turkish economy continues to grow, Turkey will look even more closely at developing better diplomatic and natural resource trade relations with suppliers in the Middle East—such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia—in order to limit their dependence on Iran and Russia.

Implications for US Foreign Policy

US foreign policy in the Middle East has been primarily concerned with security, and, due to the largely negative opinions that the Arab world has of American intervention, Turkey can function as an excellent model for the area surrounding it. And with the US's foreign policy Asia Pivot, it needs a reliable partner to continue pursuing American interests in the region. As Field and Zahedi suggest, Turkey represents the change that America wishes to see in the region:

“In short, a Muslim political party has come to power democratically on the back of a rising Muslim middle class engaged with the international economy and by promoting Western values. This is precisely the model promoted in the lofty rhetoric of the Bush Freedom Agenda, but which the US conspicuously had no actual capacity to produce. Turkey is both willing and able to promote this model throughout the Middle East and the US should back it strongly in doing so.”⁶⁰

The AKP elections are contested by some Turks as being corrupt; however, these allegations are largely without merit. Several international organizations, including the EU, congratulated the AKP and Prime Minister Erdoğan on their substantial electoral victories in the elections of 2011. President Barack Obama even called the Prime Minister to express his congratulations. Furthermore, while some

⁶⁰ Field and Zahedi, “The U.S. Security Strategy and the Role of Turkey in the New Middle East,” 78.

AKP actions concerning protesters and press freedoms should be noted and addressed, it does not keep Turkey from being an overall good model for a Middle Eastern democracy.

An overwhelming portion of the Arab public views the US with suspicion and mistrust. Meanwhile, the Middle East increasingly views Turkey more positively and Prime Minister Erdoğan is the most admired among world leaders.⁶¹ Turkey has the capacity to serve US interests in the region. There is, however, an enormous obstacle in the way: the US government is largely unpopular with the Turkish public. Over 70 percent of Turks believe US foreign policy to have a negative impact on the world, and 40 percent consider the US an enemy state.⁶² This is not only due to the immense negative press garnered from the Hood Event of July 2003. After the invasion of Iraq, Turkey and its struggle against the PKK was largely abandoned by the US as the US sought to not alienate its Kurdish support in the KRG. Though the problems with the PKK in the KRG have been resolved, ill feelings remain due to what the Turkish public saw as the massive hypocrisy of the US: “Just as the U.S. was preaching the need for unity in the fight against terrorism, its war to pre-empt a largely fabricated threat in Iraq caused a tremendous upsurge in the very real threat posed to Turkey by the PKK.”⁶³ Accordingly, public opinion regarding the US fell through the floor. It should be a top priority of the State Department to rehabilitate its image in Turkey. The high level of distrust and suspicion among Turkish citizens will make relations more difficult than they already are.

⁶¹ Telhami, “The 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll.”

⁶² Field and Zahedi, “The U.S. Security Strategy and the Role of Turkey in the New Middle East,”., 80.

⁶³ Ibid. 81.

Conclusions

Massive economic discontent allowed the AKP to sweep into office and embark on an ambitious economic program. The party's foreign policy was the brain child of Ahmet Davutoğlu, one of the most influential figures in the founding of the organization,. With his foreign policy, Davutoğlu wished to reach out to the Middle East in an effort to accept Turkey's Ottoman past, as well as to move forward economically and politically. In tandem with EU accession stalling—due to internal politics and the fall of Turkish public support—the feeling of abandonment by the US in the aftermath of the Iraq War only served to reinforce Turkish ambitions in the region. As Turkey turned its attention and its businesses towards the Middle East, it strengthened its vision of itself as a leading regional power-holder. After meeting with much economic success for their risk, the platform of Eastern expansion is upheld and policies independent of the West are maintained.

The US should tread cautiously here. Through its newfound assertiveness, Turkey is making it clear that the states of the Middle East need not be consigned to economic stagnation and political repression; as the AKP would like to teach it, you can be religious and be politically successful. Arab public opinion shows that they view the Turkish success story favorably, and as the economic arm of Turkey furthers its reach into these regions, Arab states will be more likely to lend Turkey their ears. Turkey will likely be more cautious in this respect. As its relationship with Syria's Assad has shown, “zero problems with neighbors” does not necessarily mean that neighbors will always listen and take heed.

The US should take advantage of this Turco-philía by first rehabilitating its image within Turkey. As long as a majority of the Turkish public and its officials regard the US with suspicion, it will be difficult for the US to acquire Turkish cooperation where it might conflict with Turkey's interests. The US needs to push for the major EU powers to stop stalling and make more definitive efforts

towards establishing Turkish membership. If France or Germany were to come out in support of Turkish membership, it would help to change the Turkish public's perception of the Union and set a renegotiation process in motion. However, if this takes too long and Turkey is able to further solidify its clout within the region, it may no longer be interested in membership. The Kurdish Question still plays an enormous role in foreign policy formulation, and the latest ceasefire from the PKK allows for cautious optimism that the struggle could finally be nearing its end. The US did not allow Turkey to pursue the PKK, nor did it lobby hard to get the KRG to dislodge the PKK, and its image has suffered horribly in Turkey as a result.

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APPROVAL SHEET

This is to certify that James Brodie LeBlue has successfully completed
his Senior Honors Thesis, entitled:

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